

SOCIAL MEDIA AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES TIP SHEET (PART 1)



PURPOSE

The “Social Media and Outreach Strategies Tip Sheet” is designed to illuminate the ways in which State coordinators (SCs) and local liaisons (LLs) can effectively leverage social media and novel outreach methodologies. The ultimate goal of the tip sheet is to heighten these practitioners’ ability to influence and make a more profound impact on the lives of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

This tip sheet will help SCs and LLs:

- Analyze their primary audiences by thoroughly assessing their audience’s needs and the most effective avenues for reaching them.
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the communication landscape, highlighting the advantages and potential challenges associated with various platforms or tools.
- Assess the most relevant resources to enhance their outreach strategies.

Using social media and other outreach strategies is an important way to strengthen your outreach and communication with stakeholders, which are key components in successfully reaching, informing, and retaining these audiences.

INTRODUCTION

Employing various outreach strategies can strengthen your ability to identify and assist students experiencing homelessness. These strategies encompass a diverse range of mediums - social media platforms, digital media, application-based outreach, automated voice calls (robocalls), podcasts, and the incorporation of scannable QR codes into traditional print media. In addition, utilizing these approaches can serve as a potent tool for:

- Extending outreach efforts to youth experiencing homelessness, reaching more partners and stakeholders, and amplifying your message;
- Enabling more effective and creative messaging about programs for students experiencing homelessness to various audiences;
- Elevating the work of educators and partners who support students experiencing homelessness; and
- Measuring the effectiveness and impact of communications.

OVERVIEW

Leveraging the power of social media and other outreach strategies, practitioners have the potential to extend the influence of State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) to engage with crucial stakeholders. Such influence can be achieved by leveraging the popularity of various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok. Beyond the realm of social media, there are other methods that can improve your reach. These include, but are not limited to, robocalls, the contemporary use of QR codes, and the widespread practice of mass texting. These social media tools and outreach strategies are explored in more detail below.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GOALS

Before using social media and other outreach strategies, it's helpful to develop a clear understanding of your context and goals. Reflecting on the following questions can offer valuable insights, empowering you to choose the most appropriate social media or other outreach strategy to meet your goals.

- What are your outreach and communications needs?
- Who are your target audiences?
- What is each audience's need?
- What core message do you want to disseminate (e.g., provide resources, highlight an event, explain a program, search for partnering organizations)?
- What is the call to action you want the audience to take?
- Are there pre-existing internal communication channels (e.g., listservs, newsletters) that you can (or must) use to reach key stakeholders?
- What are your goals for using social media and other outreach strategies? How will you gauge success through quantifiable and qualifiable measures?
 - For social media, quantifiable measures include engagement rates – number of likes, comments, shares, clicks, etc. Qualifiable measures include the substance or quality of the comments.
 - For digital outreach, quantifiable measures include engagement by the amount of traffic or clicks to a specific web page. For example, users may click through to a site from a QR code. These click-throughs and other calls to action can be measured on that page (e.g., signing up for an email newsletter or registering for an event).

BENEFITS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The chart below lists frequently used platforms for social media and outreach. Although this list is not exhaustive and does not account for emerging technologies, SCs and LLs can use this chart to consider which platforms are appropriate to reach their intended audience(s) and accomplish their goals.

**Note: Inclusion in the list below does not represent an endorsement of a specific social media platform or outreach strategy. Also, consider that other open-source platforms may perform functions similar to those listed in the table.*

Platform	Overview	Example Use Case	Audience Demographics	Benefits (+) and Considerations (-)
Robocalls	A mass-calling technology that sends audio messages directly to your audience.	Reach out in emergency situations or provide reminders to audience members.	Determined by user/ subscription listserv.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Can send ~3,000 calls at a time, good for urgent/emergency use and reminders. - Might be perceived as spam if used improperly or for non-urgent messages; requires opting in for non-emergencies.
Text message	Mass, outgoing written messages sent directly to your audiences' phones. This form of communication is more accessible than calls.	Send information for service requests, alerts, and surveys. Provide faster access for shelter intake, especially during inclement weather.	Determined by user/ subscription listserv.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + High open rate for outgoing messages; can also be used for inbound communication. + Smartphone users can add dates and reminders readily to their devices. + Less invasive and more subtle than robocalls, allowing for direct responses. - Might be perceived as spam if used improperly or for non-urgent messages.
QR codes	Short for "quick response," these small, square-shaped codes have uniquely patterned marks printed on materials. An audience member uses their smartphone to scan the QR code, leading them to a destination webpage.	Print codes on billboards in rural areas or posters/flyers placed in schools so users can easily and discretely access online content.	Specific to event/initiative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Can be made for free using a generator and comes with the option to track the number of times it's been scanned. - Great for source tracking but requires internal organization for reporting.

Platform	Overview	Example Use Case	Audience Demographics	Benefits (+) and Considerations (-)
Facebook	Photo, graphic, and video-based platform.	This platform may be most conducive for outreach to parents.	Reaches older audiences than other platforms. 32% of US 13-17 year-olds use Facebook; in contrast, approximately 70% of US 18-29 year-olds and 75% of US 30-64 year-olds use Facebook.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Multi-functional platform allows for event creation, social connection, and private and public groups. + Seven in ten Facebook users visit the site at least once a day. - Has a lower engagement rate than other platforms; would likely need funds for advertising.
Instagram	Image and video-sharing platform.	Explain processes, provide resources, or run an advocacy campaign through engaging visuals. The platform allows a user to save posts.	Reaches younger audiences. 62% of US 13-17 year-olds and 71% of 18-29 year-olds used Instagram. Rates decline to 48% for 30-49 year-olds and 29% for 50-64 year-olds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Nearly all Instagrammers use this in tandem with another platform (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, or TikTok). - Requires a higher level of effort for graphic and video design.
Twitter/X	Tweets are predominantly text-based messages limited to 280 characters.	Send public-facing messages to policymakers or executive members of partnering organizations.	Historically, Twitter has been most popular with younger adults (18-29 and 30-49) in the US. However, recent platform changes have led to lower usage .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Lower level of effort to start and maintain. Good platform to discover and engage with potential partners. - 10% of Tweeters create 80% of the content.
TikTok	Short-form (3 sec to 10 min in duration) video platform wherein users post a 150-character limit description often reserved for hashtags.	Share stories or communicate for advocacy and awareness campaigns targeted at younger audiences.	Reaches younger audiences. 67% of US 13-17 year-olds use the platform, 58% of which use it daily. 22% of 30-49 year-olds and 14% of 50-64 year-olds use TikTok.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Has the highest average engagement rate among platforms in this table. - Trend-based and best for creative and quick-production videos. Users can post 1-3 times/day to build a following. This platform is highly competitive.
YouTube	Free video-sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos.	Convey information or offer tutorials about complex topics or processes (e.g., rights to education, applying to or getting funds for college).	Approximately 77% of US 13-17 year-olds use YouTube <i>daily</i> . About 90% of US adults use YouTube, over half of whom use the platform daily .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Free, user-friendly platform that can help boost messaging; it is the most widely used social media platform in the US. - The ideal length for a video is 10 minutes, which may require more production time. - Ads appear before viewing content.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Explore the resources below for additional information.

- [Social Media Today](#) provides the latest insights into popular and emerging platforms, including algorithm changes and best practices.
- [Social Media Fact Sheet](#) by Pew Research Center.
- For more information on specific roles, see NCHE resources for [State Coordinators](#) and [Local Liaisons](#).

For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at homeless@serve.org, call 800.308.2145, or visit nche.ed.gov.